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STATINTL

ROUND THE WORLD

South Viet Nam

The Coup d'Etat Game

When the cat was away, the rats began to play. That was how things shaped up as soon as Maxwell Taylor left Saigon on January 26 for a "lightning visit" to Vientiane. Scarcely had Taylor turned his back than General Nguyen Khanh, the puppet south Viet Nam commander-in-chief, and his cohorts threw out the U.S.-fostered "civilian government" of Tran Van Huong who had been sworn in just a week earlier. Taylor's own January 20 coup to prop up the Huong regime had been the 7th coup since the United States liquidated Ngo Dinh Diem 15 months ago. Thus Khanh's manoeuvre raised the score in Saigon's game of "coupsmanship" to eight.

Only a day before, U.S. Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had been assured by C.I.A. Director John McCone that there was no immediate danger of Huong being overthrown. After Khanh's coup Fulbright was quoted as saying that things in south Viet Nam were "very distressing." Other congressmen appeared to be equally dejected. Senator Mike Mansfield said: "It looks as if we are dealing with coup on coup rather than a stable government." Senator George D. Aiken admitted that he had "about come to the conclusion that ambassador Maxwell Taylor has about outlived his usefulness" in south Viet Nam. He

added that "I'm not sure a successor would do any better there than ambassador Taylor." Representative Clement Zablocki went him one better: "If Taylor has outlived his usefulness, then we have, also."

For months opinion in the United States has reluctantly come to the conclusion that Washington's position in south Viet Nam is hopeless. On the one hand, the people's forces are growing continually stronger and winning victory after victory. On the other hand, the puppet regime, particularly within the puppet power groups, is torn by insoluble internal contradictions. The United States, with "Ambassador" Taylor acting as puppet-master, has been worsening the situation by pitting one group against another.

Coups and counter-coups in Saigon have led observers there to say that "now it's Taylor or Khanh, one or the other has to go." Whether Taylor is recalled — which was what the recent demonstrations in south Viet Nam demanded — or whether Khanh is tossed overboard in favour of some other stooge, the American defeat has been spelled out in capital letters. Said the *New York Times* (January 28): "The latest coup d'etat in Viet Nam is one more blow at the United States. It is a defeat." The *New York Herald Tribune* editorially declared on the same day that the situation in south Viet Nam was beyond U.S. power to control and that the "adventure" in south Viet Nam was a "grievous error."